

A systematic list of the birds of Aldabra

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La première liste systématique et documentée des oiseaux de l'Atoll d'Aldabra depuis 1967 est présentée. Elle est précédée d'une courte description du site et des activités scientifiques et de conservation qui y sont menées. Le texte inclut des informations sur la distribution, les périodes de nidification et des estimations de populations. Les dates d'observation des espèces accidentelles sont mentionnées. Un appel est lancé pour signaler toute observation non incluse dans la présente liste.

Introduction

Aldabra is the world's largest raised coral atoll, situated at the northern end of the Mozambique Channel, 850 km south-east of Dar es Salaam on the African mainland and 450 km north-west of Madagascar. It is the south-westernmost outpost of Seychelles, 1,100 km from the administrative capital of Victoria on Mahé. The landmass, c34 km east-west by 15 km north-south, comprises c30% of the total land area of Seychelles²⁰, and encircles a large, tidal lagoon, which contains almost 1,000 islands and islets¹². Astove, Cosmoledo and Assumption are the other islands of the Aldabra group.

The Royal Society initiated a programme of biological research at Aldabra in 1967, leading to the establishment of a permanent Research Station in 1971²⁹. Since 1981 the atoll has been managed by Seychelles Islands Foundation, a government statutory body, as a Nature Reserve and Natural World Heritage Site, with the stated priorities of protection, conservation and appropriate research and monitoring².

All records of species of less than annual occurrence in Seychelles, which require confirmation by Seychelles Bird Records Committee (SBRC), are included here (to 31 December 2000) and have been accepted by SBRC unless otherwise stated. Numbers of records of vagrants are presented in brackets, while nomenclature and sequence follow that used by SBRC. A previous systematic list of Aldabra's birds was compiled by Benson³ in 1967, and a more recent overview of the atoll and its birds, including taxonomic status, by Skerrett²⁰. A map showing place names is available in Stoddart & Westoll²⁹.

Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax*

Vagrant (one): two between Aldabra and Assumption on 24 November 1998.

Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus*

Vagrant (two): one found ashore at Station in 1976 (R Prŷs-Jones pers comm) and another flew north with Lesser Noddies *Anous tenuirostris* on 19 February 1999. Breeds throughout western Indian Ocean, presumably under-recorded.

Audubon's Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri*

Breeds: population estimated at c250 pairs in 2000⁶, breeding on rat-free lagoon islets. A 1996 claim that Aldabra birds constitute a race distinct from *nicolae*, named *P. l. colstoni*²⁴, is disputed (Bretagnolle & Austin unpubl. DNA analysis).

Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma monorhis*

Vagrant (two): one between Assumption and Aldabra on 12 October 1996, another in same area on 6 December 1998.

Red-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon rubricauda*

Breeds: population estimated at 1,950 pairs in 1999⁶/2000⁶, seasonally breeding on rat-free lagoon islets, main laying period January–March¹².

White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*

Breeds: population estimated at 2,000 pairs in 1999/2000⁶, breeding in all months on rat-free lagoon islets¹².

Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*

Occasional visitor? 'Has been seen at Aldabra'¹⁸. No further records. Breeds in large numbers at Cosmoledo, 70 km away, possibly overlooked.

Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*

Breeds: population estimated at 9,000–11,000 pairs in 1999/2000, an increase of 50% since 1967/68^{6,8}, in mangroves fringing lagoon, most eggs in November–April¹¹. The white form predominates, with fewer than 0.5% of the white-tailed brown phase⁸. One percent or more of African population²².

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*

Annual visitor. Up to four seen in all months but few overall records. Breeds at Cosmoledo in very small numbers, and on Madagascar.

Long-tailed Cormorant *Phalacrocorax africanus*

Vagrant (17): one on 26 January 1999 was first confirmed record for Seychelles, with further sightings of singles until April, then up to 21 in Bras L'Eglise/Bassin Flamant areas, quite possibly more (29 April 1999). Only occasional sightings of 1–2 subsequently, last on 25 November 1999, with no signs of breeding. Common breeder on Madagascar and Africa.

African Darter *Anbinga rufa*

Unconfirmed vagrant: one at West Channels on 16 July–16 September 1972 is under consideration by SBRC. There are no other Seychelles records.

Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor*

Breeds: census in 2000⁸ indicated no significant changes in numbers/distribution of combined breeding populations of this and *F. ariel* since 1976/77, when 4,000 pairs of *minor* estimated²². Three colonies in mangroves at Camp Fregat, Middle Camp and (fewer) Gionnet. Most eggs laid August–January. One percent or more of African population²³.

Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel*

Breeds: census in 2000⁸ indicated no significant changes in numbers/distribution of combined breeding populations of this and previous species since 1976/77, when 6,000 pairs of *ariel* estimated²². Main colony in mangroves at Camp Fregat, with fewer at Middle Camp and Gionnet. Most eggs laid April–October. One percent or more of African population²³.

Green-backed Heron *Butorides striatus*

Breeds: no population estimate, but number of pairs probably in high hundreds. Breeds throughout atoll, mainly October–March, colonial in some areas (up to 79 nests Île Aux Aigrettes). Race *craufordii* restricted in Seychelles to Aldabra group and probably Amirantes²⁵.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Breeds: no population estimate, but probably fewer than 100 pairs, nesting October–March, at Île Aux Aigrettes, Squacco Island, Heron Island, north-west of Gros Îlot Cavalier. Roosts near Dune d'Messe, Heron Island, Cinq Cases and Takamaka Grove. Follows goats and tortoises. Nominate race restricted in Seychelles to Aldabra and Farquhar²⁵.

Malagasy Pond-heron *Ardeola idae*

Breeds: an estimated 20–50 pairs²³, chiefly in south-east of atoll, with the main known breeding site being Île Aux Aigrettes, in October–March. All-white breeding plumage. Endemic to Aldabra, Madagascar and Europa (in the southern Mozambique Channel).

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Breeds: population estimate 1,000–3,000 pairs²³, race *dimorpha* (Dimorphic Egret), proportion of white form to dark c3:1⁵. Breeds mainly December–March in colonies of up to 50 pairs, mainly in mangrove, at a variety of sites but particularly on lagoon islands eg Île Aux Aigrettes and Île Moustiques.

Great White Egret *Egretta alba*

Vagrant (three): singles at Cinq Cases/Bassin Flamant on 28–29 August 1986, 14 February 1995, 23 July 1998 and 5 October 1998, the latter two probably same bird. Breeds Madagascar and East Africa.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Breeds: no population estimate, but probably fewer than 200 pairs, breeding throughout atoll mainly in north-west monsoon, but pattern perhaps less seasonal than other herons. Not strongly colonial, up to five pairs on some rat-free islets at La Gigi and Coffee Camp. Legs bright pink in breeding season.

Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus*

Breeds: population estimated at 100–250 pairs²³. Breeds colonially December–March, up to three eggs laid. Known sites at Bassin Flamant (up to 63 pairs³²), Takamaka Pool, Ibis Pool and near Bras des Cedres in south-west Grande Terre. Communal roost in non-breeding season at Takamaka Grove. Endemic race *T. a. abbotti* confined to Aldabra, considered along with Madagascar population to be distinct from African species, as *T. bernieri* by some authorities^{17,20}. Individual of African form *T. a. aethiopicus*, brown-eyed with black primary tips, at Cinq Cases 17 December 1967–23 February 1968, photographed.

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*

Breeds: population 25–50 individuals, the only atoll and oceanic breeding site known, except Galápagos²³. Breeding not confirmed until 13 April 1995²¹, when a chick one-third to half-grown, three nests and three incomplete nests were found at a freshwater pool in the Takamaka region. A juvenile with 13 adults, on 23 November 1995, suggests a successful outcome. Four juveniles, three nest mounds and eggshells were found in 1996²¹. Sightings largely confined to south-east part of atoll and lagoon. Fifty in February 1968 is the largest count, with 30 several times in the 1990s, apparently resident, though Abbott reported 'hundreds' in the late 19th century. Breeds Madagascar and East Africa.

White-faced Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna viduata*

Vagrant (three): single adults on 21 September 1969 (specific locality unknown), at Cinq Cases on 15–26 April 1973 and 26–27 June 1974. Only Seychelles records apart from one at Assumption. Three other unconfirmed sightings. Common East Africa and Madagascar.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

Vagrant (one): eclipse drake/female probably of this species at Settlement Reef on 12 November 1986¹. Annual migrant to Seychelles and East Africa.

Black (Yellow-billed) Kite *Milvus (migrans) aegyptius*

Vagrant (6+): Abbott collected two, on 2 October and 19 December 1892, and also taken by Mortimer on 18 November 1903 and another by Thibault on 6 August 1906. Series of sightings in early 1974 involved 3–6 birds: one at Settlement on 21 January, two from 24 January, 2–3 on 25 January–1 February and one on 9 February. One at Takamaka on 25 January, one at Dune d'Messe on 26 January and 2 February, and one at Cinq Cases on 10 February

1974. Only confirmed Seychelles records. Common at Comoros and Madagascar and an intra-African migrant.

Montagu's/Pallid Harrier *Circus pygargus/C. macrourus*

Vagrant (one): female/immature at Bassin Cabri on 4 March 2000. No other Seychelles records of either species.

Madagascar Kestrel *Falco newtoni*

Breeds: not more than 50 individuals, probably closer to 15-20 pairs³². Up to five eggs laid October, in traditional territories, eggs sometimes infertile. Endemic to Aldabra and Madagascar²³.

Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonora*

Vagrant (seven): recorded on six dates in 1972 between 31 October and 27 December, with three on 21 November. Adult on 7-19 November 1999. Eighteen other records, 12 in late September-December and six in March-April, may refer to this species or Sooty Falcon *F. concolor*. Breeds Mediterranean/North Africa, most moving to Madagascar in non-breeding season. Presumably under-recorded, possibly near annual.

Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*

Vagrant (one): single photographed on 12 December 1972 at Settlement. See also Eleonora's Falcon.

Aldabra (White-throated) Rail *Dryolimnas cuvieri*

Breeds: c8,000 individuals estimated in 1974/5⁹ with counts in 1999/2000 indicating no significant change³². Found also on Madagascar, but race *aldabranus* endemic to Aldabra²⁵ and recently considered specifically, *D. aldabranus*¹⁷. Main population on Île Malabar, small numbers on Polymnie, Île Aux Cedres and some other lagoon islets. Cats are thought to have caused local extirpations on Grande Terre and Picard. The Aldabra form has lost power of flight³⁰ (those on Madagascar have not)¹⁷, and is only remaining flightless bird in Indian Ocean. Breeds December-March. Nine pairs reintroduced to Picard in October 1999 from Malabar^{6,31}.

Striped Crake *Aenigmatolimnas marginalis*

Vagrant (one): single collected by F R Mortimer at Picard, as a male, on 10 December 1904, and held in American Museum of Natural History (New York), subsequently accepted as female²⁸.

Allen's Gallinule *Porphyrio alleni*

Vagrant (two): adult photographed at Bassin Flamant on 15 February 1995, and an adult at Station on 10 January 1999. Breeds Madagascar.

Gallinule sp.

Vagrant (one): juvenile at Bassin Flamant on 29 July 1999 may have been *P. alleni* or an American Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio martinica*.

Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*

Annual migrant: up to 2,800 September-May, peaking January-April⁶, is 1% or more of African population²³. Few hundred usually present May-August. Major roost sites at La Gigi, Settlement Beach, Grand Cavalier, islets west of Île Michel and especially Île Moustiques.

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Vagrant (one): single at east end of atoll on 29 October 1976-4 August 1977.

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis (dominica) fulva*

Vagrant (two): three males and two females at Cinq Cases on 15 April 1973, one male in full breeding plumage, and an adult entering breeding plumage near Bassin Flamant on 1 April 1999. Annual migrant to Seychelles.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Annual migrant. Up to 50 at Dune Patates high-tide roost. Scarce April-August.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Annual migrant. Present in small numbers September-May, max. count 17.

Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*

Annual migrant. Seldom distinguished from Greater Sand Plover *C. leschenaultii*. Up to 60 at Dune Patates roost in December, outnumbering *leschenaultii*. Scarce April-July.

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*

Annual migrant. Seldom distinguished from Lesser Sand Plover *C. mongolus*. Up to 1,000 of both species at Dune Patates high-tide roost October-March, scarce April-July.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Annual migrant. Small parties August-March at Grand Cavalier and Île Moustiques at high tide, up to 350 counted in January 2000.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Annual migrant. Largest counts at high-tide roosts (La Gigi, Île Moustiques, Grand Cavalier) usually in March, max. 170 in 2000, scarce May-August.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Vagrant (six): singles at Grand Cavalier on 30 November and 6 December 1967, five at Île Moustiques on 26 August 1974 and two there on 8 October 1978, with one at Grand Cavalier on 13 January 2000 and two there on 26 January 2000. Annual migrant to Seychelles and East Africa, presumably under-recorded.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Annual migrant. Small numbers, max. count 50 at Île Moustiques in March 2000. Scarce April-July.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Vagrant (two): two near Cinq Cases on 24 December 1967, one to at least 28 January 1968¹⁸, and one at Cinq Cases landing stage on 2 February 1999. Strongly migratory, annual in Seychelles, presumably under-recorded.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleuca*

Annual migrant. Present, usually singly, around lagoon shore and inland pools, scarcer May–June. Occasional parties in March, presumably migrating, max. 23 on 25 March 1999.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*

Vagrant (c10): small numbers recorded by Penny¹⁸ around lagoon shore, max. 12 on 6 December 1967 at Grand Cavalier, with singles at Passe Dubois on 24 August 1974, and Picard Station on 3 October 1983 and 17 September 1999. Annual visitor to Seychelles, Madagascar and East Africa, presumably under-recorded.

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Annual migrant. Estimated 500–1,000 in non-breeding season, is 1% or more of African population²³. Decline in late April, numbers increasing again in August.

Pintail Snipe *Gallinago stenura*

Vagrant (one); single caught and killed at Settlement, Picard, on 20 November 1973. Breeds Asia.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Annual migrant. Scarce but undoubtedly under-recorded. Generally absent March–August. Usually only 1–3, rarely up to 22, with max. 91 at Anse Mais on 4 December 1967¹⁸.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

Vagrant (four): recorded by Penny¹⁸ on 30 November 1967 and 2 December 1967 (44 at Esprit), and by Frith¹⁴ on 3 October 1972 (12) and 5 October 1973 (200). No other double-figure counts in Seychelles, where it is an annual migrant.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

Annual migrant. Large numbers feed in lagoon at low tide, scarce late April–late August, counts of up to 2,000 in Dune Patates high-tide roost October–March.

Subantarctic Skua *Catharacta antarctica*

Vagrant (seven): recorded in November 1971, on 7 May 1976, 21 December 1977, 30 June 1981, all as ‘Great Skua’, then on 6 December 1998, 15 December 1998 and 18 June 1999, the latter identified as race *lonnbergi*, the most likely to occur. Annual migrant to Seychelles from Antarctic breeding grounds and presumably under-recorded.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Vagrant (one): sub-adult of nominate race, which breeds Baltic and north Norway, at Picard Station, on 19–28

November 1999. Three earlier records unconfirmed, in 1964¹⁹, on 7 December 1976 and 28 December 1984. Vagrant to Seychelles.

Black-/Grey-/Brown-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus/cirrocephalus/brunnicephalus*

Vagrant (one): single at Cinq Cases on 19 December 1994–15 February 1995.

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*

Breeds: five pairs in 2000⁶. The only breeding site in Seychelles. Twelve pairs in July 1986, and 30 in May 1972 are the largest counts. Île Moustiques is favoured breeding location, though Sylvestre, Champignon des Os, Esprit, La Gigi and possibly Île Michel also used. Lays April–August, with high tides main cause of egg loss, though Ship Rats *Rattus rattus* may contribute¹³. Apparently resident.

Greater Crested Tern *Sterna bergii*

Breeds: 60–100 pairs^{13,23}. Lays December–January and June–August¹³, on lagoon islets: Northern Mentor, Pti Mentor, Îles Chalandes, Table Ronde, Îlot Deder, Grand Mentor, Îlot Marquois, Champignon des Os and Sesame. Largest count 150 at Îles Chaland on 25 June 1997. Close observation causes desertion¹³. Present year-round.

Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*

Probably near-annual migrant. Recorded regularly January–early April in 1967/68¹⁰. Up to four displaying at Picard in June 1998, followed by occasional sightings of 1–2 in November 1998–May 1999, with up to seven in late December 1999. Breeds in East Africa, common migrant to Madagascar and annual migrant to Seychelles, presumably under-recorded at Aldabra.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Vagrant (seven), but probably annual migrant: adult in breeding plumage in March 1995, first-summer on 22–24 July 1998, adult on 25 September 1998, adult on 11 October 1998, two on 6 January 1999, 1–2 juveniles on four dates in November 1999 and four adults on 27 November 1999. Presumably under-recorded, being an annual migrant to Seychelles and East Africa.

White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa*

Vagrant (one): adult in full breeding plumage photographed with Black-naped Terns *S. sumatrana* at Îles Chaland on 12 December 1976 was previously accepted as Seychelles’ first Common Tern *S. hirundo*²⁰ but has been re-identified and accepted by SBRC as first Seychelles *S. repressa*.

Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana*

Breeds: population 1999/2000 thought unchanged since estimate of c70 pairs in 1967/68¹⁰. Breeds on rat-free lagoon islets in tiny groups of up to three pairs per islet. Eggs February–March and August–September⁶. Fifty

roosting on beach at Cinq Cases in November 1985 is largest count. Present throughout year.

Saunders' Tern *Sterna saundersi*

Annual visitor. Wintering population 800 birds²³. Usually arrives late August, roosting on south coast, especially at Cinq Cases, West Grande Terre (max. 800 in October 1997) and lagoons at Îles Chaland and Champignon des Os¹. By mid-February 90% in breeding plumage, when absence of white supercilium indicative of *saundersi*. Absent April–July, main breeding areas around Red Sea and southern Somalia.

Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus*

Vagrant (two): singles near Île Esprit on 25 July 1971 and off Picard on 18 June 2000. Breeds Cosmoledo²⁵, presumably under-recorded.

Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*

Annual visitor. No record of breeding, huge colony on Cosmoledo²³. Small parties offshore or heard at night during breeding season, May–October, peaking August when parties may number up to 50.

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*

Vagrant (six): breeding-plumage adult and immature in East Lagoon on 5–6 April 1974, first-year at Passe Femme on 17–18 December 1998, immature/non-breeding adult at Cinq Cases landing stage on 1 April 1999, two first-years off West Grande Terre on 22 November 1999, and single there 16 and 21 December 1999. Annual migrant to Seychelles, possibly under-recorded.

Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*

Breeds: estimate of min. 3,500 birds¹³. Breeds on rat-free lagoon islets, particularly Coffee Camp, Table Ronde and Pink Rock, most lay September–March, few outside this period¹³. Present throughout year.

Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris*

Occasional visitor: one landed on a yacht 10 km off north-west coast on 28 October 1976, died, and is now in the Natural History Museum (Tring); one in lagoon on 10 September 1998; and up to 10 feeding with Brown Noddy *A. stolidus* and Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* 1–5 km off Station on 12–13 February 1999, with 5,000+ flying north in dense groups at dusk, probably continuing to pass after dark, on 19 February 1999⁵ (a phenomenon repeated in February 2000⁶). Abundant in Seychelles with strong seasonal movements, easily overlooked among Brown Noddy *A. stolidus* and presumably under-recorded.

Fairy Tern *Gygis alba*

Breeds: 100–400 pairs²⁷ mainly in mangroves fringing lagoon (not southern shore) and on islands within it, eggs September–early April¹³. Present throughout year.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

Vagrant (one): single shot at Picard Station on 4 December 1972 was first record in Seychelles.

Madagascar Turtle Dove *Streptopelia picturata*

Resident breeder: 2,000–5,000 pairs²⁵. Nests mainly October–February. Race *coppingeri* confined, in Seychelles, to Aldabra and Cosmoledo²⁵, though recent study may indicate that latter population is distinct subspecies (G Rocamora & A Skerrett pers comm). Birds from Aldabra have apparently reached Îles Glorieuse²⁷.

Comoro Blue Pigeon *Alectroenas sganzzini*

Resident breeder: no population estimate, but probably more than 1,000 pairs. Widely distributed, highest density on Malabar⁵, eggs January–March. Race *minor* endemic to Aldabra²⁵.

Eurasian Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Vagrant (one): a juvenile at Settlement on 29–31 October 1999.

Cuckoo *Cuculus* spp.

Vagrant (two): one on 2–16 November 1972 and one near Settlement on 15 January 2000. At least three additional unconfirmed records. Eurasian *C. canorus*, Asian Lesser *C. poliocephalus*, Oriental *C. saturatus* and Madagascar Lesser *C. rochii* all possible, and first two are vagrants to Seychelles.

Madagascar Coucal *Centropus toulon*

Resident breeder: population of race *insularis*, endemic to Aldabra, estimated at 400–800 pairs²³. Eggs December–early April³³. Widely but sparsely distributed, greatest density at Picard⁷.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

Formerly resident, now extinct. 'Common on Aldabra in 1893 when Abbott was there, one collected in 1906, not seen since'¹⁹. Presumed natural colonist. Shortage of rat-, cat- and crab-proof nest-sites (elevated caves preferred in granitic islands) may have contributed to extinction.

Madagascar Nightjar *Caprimulgus madagascariensis*

Resident breeder: race *aldabrensis* endemic to Aldabra²⁵ estimated at 500–1,000 pairs²³. Nests September–January. Widely but thinly distributed.

Common Swift *Apus apus*

Vagrant (three), but records listed with qualifier regarding other all-dark swifts²⁵: one collected by Abbott on 1 December 1892, one collected by Benson & Penny⁴ on 8 September 1967 at Settlement and one on 15 March 1968.

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus*

Vagrant (three): two at Anse Var on 22–23 March 1968, four around Station on 2–5 April 1999 and two at Anse Var on 6 April 1999.

European Roller *Coracias garrulus*

Vagrant (six): singles on 19 March 1968, 10 December 1974, 20–21 March 1975, 26 March 1999 and 1–7 April 1999, with two on 16–17 March 1975.

Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus glaucurus*

Probably annual migrant: 27 records of up to six birds²⁸. One on 7 November 1999 at Settlement was killed and eaten, presumably by an Eleonora's Falcon present in same area. Main passage mid-October–late December (25 records), particularly November, with singles January and March. Further record on 25 October 2000 under consideration by SBRC. Vagrant in Seychelles.

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Vagrant (two): one at Settlement, on 20–22 October 1993, was photographed and demonstrated to be of the African form *U. e. africana*, while a probable juvenile at Station/Old Settlement, on 14–18 October 1999, had white in the primaries, a feature of European and North African races.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Vagrant (two): one collected by Abbott on 2 December 1892 and two at West Channels on 2 January 1968. One on 5 October 2000 is under consideration by SBRC.

Mascarene Martin *Phedina borbonica*

Vagrant (two): one collected by Abbott on 19 November 1892 and one at Station on 8 October 1973.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Near-annual migrant. Records are incomplete but show almost 30 sightings late September–early April (26 listed by SBRC²⁸), over 50% in late October–November, with smaller peak mid-March–early April. Never more than six, apart from 25 on 16 March 1975 and over 50 on 24 March–7 April 1999⁷. Vagrant in Seychelles.

Common House Martin *Delichon urbica*

Vagrant (two): single at Station on 13 October 1974 and two at Cinq Cases on 14 March 1975.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

Vagrant (six): *M. f. lutea* collected by Abbott on 20 December 1892, same race at Cinq Cases on 22 February 1968 and Passe Houareau on 15 March 1968, single at Dune Jean-Louis, also on 15 March 1968, single of unspecified race on 25–28 March 1996 and first-year male *lutea* at Station on 24–25 March 1999.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Vagrant (two): one at Dune Jean-Louis on 7 March 1973 and one for four weeks from 21 November 1983.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

Probably near-annual migrant: 13 records²⁸. Up to four present simultaneously, mainly October–December, rarely January–March. Series of sightings on 23 November–25 December 2000 under consideration by SBRC. Vagrant in Seychelles.

Madagascar Bulbul *Hypsipetes madagascariensis*

Resident breeder: 4,000–8,000 pairs²³. Race *rostratus* endemic to Aldabra²⁵. Breeds December–February, widespread including larger islets; highest density Picard and south-east Grande Terre⁵.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

Vagrant (five): one on 16–17 March 1975, then in 1999, two males at Settlement and another at La Gigi on 24 March, a female at Settlement on 25 March and a further male at Passe Houareau on 26 March⁷.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*

Vagrant (one): male in breeding plumage at Picard, collected on 28 March 1968, is only Seychelles record.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Near-annual migrant: 25 records, all between 22 December and 30 March, are as follows December (one), January (11), February (six) and March (seven). Vagrant in Seychelles.

Aldabran Brush Warbler *Nesillas aldabranus*

Probably extinct, former resident breeder. Species endemic to Aldabra, discovered by Penny on Royal Society Expedition of 1967: male, female, nest and three eggs collected, now at Natural History Museum (Tring). Only ever seen within a 50 m x 2 km coastal strip at west end of Malabar. Max. population c25 birds, last sighting September 1983¹⁶. Bred probably October–January. Searches during 1990s unsuccessful^{5,6}.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Vagrant (one): adult around Station and La Gigi on 17 February–14 March 2000.

Willow Warbler/Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus trochilus* / *P. collybita*

Vagrant (one): single at an islet in Passe Femme on 10 April 1972.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

Vagrant (one): single shot on 12 December 1972.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

Vagrant (one): single trapped at Anse Var on 30 October 1974 is only Seychelles record.



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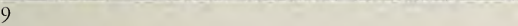
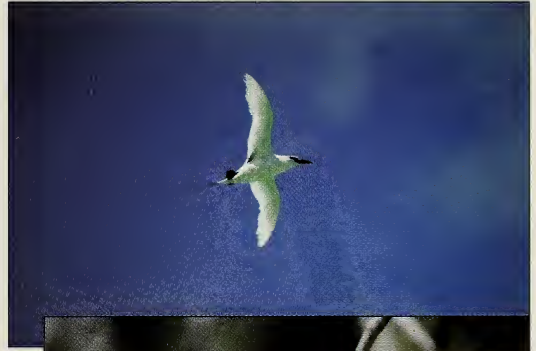
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- Figure 1. Little Egret *Egretta garzetta dimorpha*
 Figure 2. Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus*
 Figure 3. Juvenile Malagasy Pond-heron *Ardeola idae*
 foraging alongside Aldabra Giant Tortoise
Dipsochelys dussumieri
 Figure 4. Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus glaucurus*
 Figure 5. Aldabra (White-throated) Rail *Dryolimnas cuvieri*
 Figure 6. Old reef, Anse, Aldabra
 Figure 7. Juvenile Aldabra Drongo *Dicrurus aldabranus*
 Figure 8. (Aldabra) Forest Fody *Foudia eminentissima*
aldabrana
 Figure 9. Dune d'Messe camp, Grande Terre with lagoon
 in background, Aldabra
 Figure 10. Red-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon rubricauda*
 Figure 11. Comoro Blue Pigeon *Alectroenas gszanzini*
 Figure 12. Madagascar White-eye *Zosterops maderaspatana*
 Figure 13. Souimanga Sunbird *Nectarinia souimanga*
 Figure 14. Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana*
 Figure 15. Madagascar Kestrel *Falco newtoni*
 Figure 16. Madagascar Turtle Dove *Streptopelia picturata*
 Figure 17. Madagascar Bulbul *Hypsipetes madagascariensis*



All photos by Michael Betts

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

Near-annual migrant with 21 records: four in November, one in December, 16 in March. Usually singles, occasionally more in March (at least 13 in 1999⁷). Vagrant in Seychelles.

Souimanga Sunbird *Nectarinia souimanga*

Resident breeder: easily most abundant bird on Aldabra, with number of pairs in the high tens of thousands^{5,32}. Nests mainly September–April, throughout atoll including small lagoon islets, highest density south-east Grande Terre⁵. Race *aldabrensis* endemic to Aldabra²⁵, recently considered conspecific only with Madagascar population, with those on other three islands of Aldabra group being considered separate species^{17,26}. Re-trapping of ringed birds has shown they can survive for over ten years¹.

Madagascar White-eye *Zosterops maderaspatana*

Resident breeder: 4,000–10,000 pairs²³ may be a significant underestimate³². Race *aldabrensis* endemic to Aldabra²⁵. Breeds mid-September–March, widespread and abundant, scarcer on Malabar⁵. Feeding and roosting parties number up to 35 individuals.

Aldabra Drongo *Dicrurus aldabranus*

Resident breeder: c500 pairs²³. Endemic to Aldabra. Breeds November–January. Widely but thinly distributed, favouring *Casuarina* woodland and mangrove, the latter an extensive habitat at Aldabra.

Pied Crow *Corvus albus*

Resident breeder: 60–73 individuals in 2000, no overall increase since 1974⁶. Nests November–February, but success very low and few breeding attempts in some years. Numbers perhaps remain low through combination of low productivity due to occasional food shortages in breeding period, and an unknown level of unauthorised killing of adults⁶. Thought to have colonised naturally and was recorded at Astove, in the Aldabra group, as early as 1836, long before human settlement²⁶.

European Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

Vagrant (four): female at Settlement on 11–28 March 1968 (collected), female or first-year at Settlement on 19 November 1972, female at La Gigi on 24 March 1999 and four singing males at Cinq Cases on 1 April 1999⁷.

Wattled Starling *Creatophora cinerea*

Vagrant or recent colonist (10+): two on 29 September 1998, two on 2 November 1998 and 14 on 2 September 1999, with up to seven fairly regularly in same area (Bassin Cabri, near Research Station on Picard) throughout 2000, but breeding not confirmed. One other Seychelles record.

(Aldabra) Forest Fody *Foudia eminentissima*

Resident breeder: 1,000–3,000 pairs²³. Race *aldabrana*

endemic to Aldabra²⁵, though recently treated specifically¹⁷. Breeds October–mid-April²⁷, widespread, favouring mixed scrub and *Casuarina* woodland, rather than *Pemphis* thicket⁵ and also mangrove. Many nests predated by Ship Rat *Rattus rattus*¹⁵. Parties of up to 50 at Cinq Cases, but not in recent years. Flavistic birds seen occasionally.

Domestic Fowl *Gallus gallus*

Extinct, formerly a domestic import, which was sporadically present until late 1997.

Records

For long periods (particularly during 1980s and 1990s) systematic bird recording was not maintained at Aldabra and records are sparse. There are unconfirmed records of Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*, Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, Humblot's Heron *Ardea humbloti*, Pintail *Anas acuta*, White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus* and European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*. Anyone with information on these or any other records not included here is requested to send details to Adrian Skerrett, Shipping House, PO Box 336, Victoria, Mahé, Seychelles; e-mail adrian@skerrett.fsnet.co.uk.

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